



**TOWN OF  
SOUTHBURY**  
PARKS AND RECREATION  
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February 6, 2023

To whom it may concern,

My name is Lexi Polasek and I hold a Master's Degree in Recreation and Leisure Studies and am currently employed as the Recreation Supervisor for Southbury Parks and Recreation. I am also the Co-Chair for the Camps Section Committee for Connecticut Recreation and Parks Association (CRPA), on the Safety Committee for the Town of Southbury, and am an instructor through the American Red Cross for CPR/AED and First Aid.

I am testifying against the bill HB-06574 – An Act Concerning Municipal Youth Camps by detailing the safety features of functioning municipal youth camps.

First and foremost, there are numerous policies and procedures that Southbury Parks and Recreation enforce for all staff to ensure the safety of our camps. This bill requires much of what we already do. Our camp counselors and supervisors undergo rigorous training and follow policies/procedures that include but are not limited to:

- Town of Southbury's policies and procedures
- Guidance on child interaction (i.e. positive reinforcement, encouragement, engagement, etc.)
- Ways to deal with bullying and difficult scenarios
- Minor Abuse Protection Policy (MAPP)
- Leadership and team building
- Certification in Red Cross CPR/AED and first aid
- Mandated Reporter training through Department of Children and Families (DCF)
- Certification in medication administration and epi-pen (supervisors only)
- Annual background check
- Attendance to four in-person training dates held by Southbury Parks and Recreation administrative staff
- Collection of health and camper information through Southbury Parks and Recreation forms

Additionally, the following are safety features Southbury Parks and Recreation conducts:

- The Risk Manager for the town of Southbury assesses and visits the camp facility to advise the Parks and Recreation office on policies and best practices
- The Southbury Police Department provides a Corporal to assess the facility to identify potential issues and creates and implements strategies to reduce risks

Secondly, Southbury Parks & Recreation creates a safe experience without frivolous spending to provide camps at the lowest cost possible. The perfect detail example of price comparison is the background checking software we currently use. If this bill passes and Southbury Parks and Recreation becomes a licensed camp, the OEC's background checks are eight times more expensive per person per year, compared to our current provider which access the same databases and generate the same results and reporting. Additionally, Southbury Parks and Recreation would need a registered nurse, or APRN, whose only role would be to be on standby for first aid, administering epi-pens, and/or administering medication, regardless of if they are needed or not. In case of emergency, 911 help would be requested regardless of and in addition to a Registered Nurse on staff. Basic health and safety duties are currently performed by camp supervisors, who can also engage with the campers during the day through camp activities, instead of sitting by waiting for something to happen. Acquiring and retaining a high-cost Registered Nurse is a waste of resources, time, and money. The cost of which would go onto the public and increase the cost of camps.

Southbury Parks and Recreation is not the only municipal camp in the State of Connecticut that provides the above trainings for their seasonal staff with similar strict policies and procedures in place. Numerous other municipal camps throughout the State of Connecticut follow many, if not all or more of the details in this letter. Municipal youth camps have the support of their local departments which may include the Board of Education, Police Department, and Fire Department, that provide guidance and risk management assessments for youth camps.

Let's address the other major issue, statewide the workforce is hurting. There are "help wanted signs" at a majority of locations. Before the pandemic, the OEC, DCF and Care4Kids had a high volume of inquiries. If this bill is passed, this is going to put more strain on these departments who are already understaffed. This bill is also going to put more strain on Parks and Recreation Departments, and other municipal organizations, who also are understaffed. This expectation on the departments to do more, with so little, is not feasible.

The driving factor is children's safety, community, and cost. Southbury Parks and Recreation is able to provide a safe camp at a low cost. I understand that this bill is intended to ensure children's safety, but this method harmfully impacts the community. This bill will create more members of the public that need help paying for camp/childcare but do not qualify for

Care4Kids. Additionally, to mitigate costs, our camp size will have to shrink which would result in fewer children experiencing the wonder of camp.

Southbury Parks and Recreation's youth camp strives to be a well-operated, enriching, and safe camp without the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) guidance. If there is ever a safety concern or guidance needed, youth municipal camps have a network of professionals outside of their town/city to rely on, apart from the OEC. This network is offered openly through CRPA, specifically the Camps Sections Committee that meets an average of once of month. In these meetings, dozens of towns, cities, and youth municipal camp professionals meet to discuss topics to create usable solutions. CRPA's current networking system of professionals already provide excellent safe and enriching summer camps throughout the State of Connecticut.

In closing, our camps serve the community by enriching the childhood summer experience in a safe and cost-effective way. CT professionals across the state already follow many of the strict guidelines this bill would enforce. The aspects of this bill that we have chosen not to utilize are omitted carefully, shifting the most important safety regulations to staff with administrative roles. These omissions are agreed to by the Camp Sections Committee through the CRPA and town emergency services. My main concern is the safety of my campers and staff, had this bill been an asset to Parks and Recreation/municipal camps I would have certainly embraced it. Reading this bill with my five years of experience, I only see my staff suffering and our community no longer being able to afford to join us for a camping adventure all children should have access to.

All the best,



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Lexi Polasek, M.S.

Recreation Supervisor

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